

I have been thinking about the need to communicate to all of the Followers of Christ stakeholders, perhaps with a newsletter. A note of inquiry from a friend prompted me to respond, and in doing so, I realized I had the makings of one. So I have decided to let this be a beginning.

Worship

Just in terms of worship, we are still slowly making adjustments, both in my approach and in the reception. We have been through 2 worship cycles now (although I have gotten to worship with the NSP Min Security guys 3 times due to filling pulpit supply once for Ruth Karlsson). I am adjusting to trying to use the "NSP Christian Song Book" (that Pastor Bud put together years ago) to fit with guitar accompaniment a little better.

The Med/Max guys on 3rd Sundays still aren't sure who will be there on any given Sunday, if anyone, and I'm getting a little push-back from a few of them, wanting to do "their thing," when I understand that a few guys taking over and doing their thing was not feeding the whole group, and that is why we were asked to come. But I am now finally a clergy visitor for their music leader, so I hope that I will soon be better able to help them feel like they are part of what is going on, not an alternative to it. I think it also helps when they experience a liturgical service with Gospel, and realize it's not only OK, but full of goodness.

Our first service at York NCCW was a bit of an adventure, but at our 2nd one, we got to address some things, and it really felt like we were all in it together and I was very pleased.

Study

The group that stays for study after the Med/Max worship has really been lifting me up. They are so attentive in worship, and so invested in Jesus, that our discussions there have been just amazing and helpful.

The study time after the Minimum Security worship has been the opposite. There are 2 studies going on at the same time, and right now it feels like offering the participants a choice between personalities of leaders, and the other leader (Bill Hance) has history and credibility. So anyone who stays for the study goes to "his," and no one to "mine." (The fact that they just heard me talk may play into it as well, if they want to hear an alternative perspective.) But I am working on a proposal to Bill that we characterize each of our approaches (in ways that are positive of each) to give people a choice between approaches, not persons, and especially to encourage those who do not normally stay, to stay for something different.

Ecumenism

It is very important to me to establish relationships with the other leaders, that will contribute to a sense of one congregation with multiple leaders and varying approaches, but who are all still part of the same Body of Christ. I have gotten to know (and even work with, at one service) the leader of the 1st Saturday & 1st Sunday services (Robin Calcara), and have just offered my guitar services to both him and Ruth Karlsson (2nd Saturday) after both commented that they had no means of accompanying music. We'll see if anything comes of that.

Administration

I understood from Bob that I was supposed to record and track participation of inmates, but getting access to that information has been inconsistent and a learning experience. I think it is settling down now. Just being a recognizable face due to repetition has helped people trust me. In the meantime, I am building a pretty helpful database. It has meant a fair investment in data entry time, using the NDCS online searchable database, but effort should be greatly reduced going forward, with repetition of participants. I have received a request from a church to send 30-40 postcards to a group of inmates (a larger project Bob did last year) for their Sept 9 GWOH project I am hoping to supply from this database.

NSP Staffing Difficulties

I have experienced some frustration with not being able to get escorted to the worship center at NSP until inmates are already there. Unfortunately, the officers at NSP are riding the ragged edge due to minimal staffing. I have a strong sense of call to the staff as well as the inmates, that the Kingdom of God be known by all. I will do whatever I can to make it easier for them to facilitate our being there.

Besides directly delaying the start of worship, delaying my arrival contributes to the inmates' perception that no one is coming, so they will just do their own thing. I also find that once others arrive, many people want to talk to me, which makes it difficult to get set up if I haven't had a chance to do so before they got there.

So one result has been to try to find ways to shorten the service even more (it was already only a 45 minute service, with communion, because we really can't start before 10 after, in order for inmates to be processed at the door and get into the worship space, and I need to release them by 5 till, so they can travel on the hour). But we cannot lose sight of the need to hear the Gospel, and respond with prayer and worship.

Training

Another thing that I hope will help is that, once I complete my NDCS training, I will be able to move on campus without an escort, which will help both the institution and me. I had to apply for "Full-time Volunteer Clergy" status with a resume and interview with the "Religion Studies Committee." I had my interview on July 31, and was accepted August 5, with intention to start training August 19. But that class filled up with correctional officers (same training, at least the 1st 5 weeks, for both of us), which is a good thing (more new officers), so my training is now scheduled to begin Sept 9, completing October 11. It is 40 hours a week, during regular business hours, and it was stressed to me that there are no absences allowed, no make-up days.

So one implication is that I will miss TheoCon this year. I do still intend to continue leading worship at our regularly scheduled times, but it will mean a lot of extra hours. I will be ready for a holiday when that is over. But it is worth it, because I feel like this is a bad time to have a substitute, for all the reasons above.

Personal Time

Speaking of "holidays," I took a couple of days off already, at the beginning of August, and went to Missouri to visit my Mom. She has diabetes and something went wrong with her blood sugar and blood pressure, and she ended up in the hospital, and then a nursing home for a while, with lingering dementia. The time at the hospital and nursing home were very good, as the constant attention to her body and meds seems to have helped tremendously. She has now been moved to an Assisted Living apartment. I am concerned that that will mean less attention to her blood chemistry and meds, but have been assured it is still very good. Meanwhile, my sisters and their kids have gotten her old apartment emptied. My mom's attitude to being so out of control has been better than I expected, but it has been a very stressful time for all. Your prayers surrounding the whole situation are greatly appreciated.

Installation

Another implication of missing TheoCon is that that is when the Synod Office proposed to have an installation. I would rather not try to squeeze it into a worship service (once again, for all the reasons listed above), and I think it would come across as presumptuous to people with whom I find myself needing to earn some credibility. So the latest proposal is to try to do it at the "Freed for Life" banquet, which I think would be quite appropriate. I still need to follow up with the others involved in planning that (Mary, Rhonda, Jan, Bud, Dave, Bonnie, Jim, & Tammy, I will communicate separately on that).

Freed for Life Banquet

For those of you who don't have it on your radar yet, Freed for Life is November 10. Please mark your calendars, plan to attend, and spread the word!

Visits

I have been given several names of people inside who I should visit. Unfortunately, visiting them seems to require that I complete my NDCS training, or be put on their clergy visitor list (which only they can initiate), or both. I have now gotten set up as a Clergy Visitor, but how to connect with people who do not come to worship is not clear to me yet, and I am still learning how to get things done in this system. Waiting for the training, of course, means quite a delay. Regardless, there won't be any time for visiting during the training, and I am trying to get ahead on worship planning so that it will be practical to not miss a beat with worship during training.

Networking

I have attended my first RAN (Re-entry Alliance of Nebraska) meeting, attended a FEAST Partners cook-out, and have worshipped with a handful of churches who support Followers of Christ, getting to know some of the people there.

I have connected with Jim Carroll (or I should say he connected with me) regarding the Crossroads Connection worships and community at Omaha. We need some help serving communion at Omaha Community Corrections every other month on 3rd Sundays, unfortunately a day when we now have service at NSP every month. Can anyone help us out there?

Carm Aderman has been very helpful, by getting me added to the roster for "Hero's Journey," a writing class for inmates, but we are at a pause between classes right now as Carm is preparing fall classes (thanks very much to her!).

If any of you would like to use this "newsletter" format to help the rest of us connect and contribute to all the various ministries networked through Followers of Christ, please let me know. I look forward to solidifying connections.

Relationships & Get Together?

I had hoped to find a time to get many of the people copied here together at a "summer picnic," but have been slow just to figure out who is who, not to mention being a little overwhelmed as I take on so many new tasks. That being said, I would still like to get together, perhaps after training. There is much actual work to be done, not to mention the opportunity to form relationships, the heart of who we are and what we do. How do the first couple weekends of November look to you all? We could try to schedule an actual Board meeting after that.

Promotion Ministry

I have my first guest preaching date this coming Sunday at Spirit of Hope Lutheran Church at The Highlands, NW Lincoln. We will have a chance for Q&A between worship services there. I am looking forward to it. I will not plan anything for the first Sundays of October, due to NDCS training, but am open to opportunities at the beginning of November, if anyone would like to have me come out.

We have a new Kairos weekend planned for mid-October. This is a great opportunity for inmates who generally have trouble staying out of trouble to learn how to change their approach to life, and who do not normally have a relationship with Jesus or a worshipping community, to be introduced. My role will be limited a bit by my Followers of Christ transition, but it is an exciting time for people who think God hates them to find out the opposite. Please pray for open hearts.

People

Thanks to you all for your love, support, and prayers. If any of you would like to attend worship as a volunteer, please let me know. Besides connecting the participants with the greater Body of Christ, volunteers are helpful before and after worship. If you would be willing to sing, let me know that also, and I will be sure and send you music ahead of time.

Please scan this distribution list, and if you see that a Followers of Christ stakeholder is missing, please forward it to them, and copy to me, with a description of who the person is / how they are connected. I am sure there are still people for me to "meet." Thank you all so much!

-- Rob Corum, Pastor
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